No. 19 Price 10 Cents

The GREAT SACRIFICE

The Tragedy of an Unwanted Bride

IT WAS done in a most brutal manner, while the victim offered little or no resistance. He seemed to be quite willing to accept the punishment which was to have been inflicted upon someone else. On his face was a faint smile of resignation. It was the smile one might have seen on the face of religious martyrs of old about to be put to death because they refused to relinquish their faith.

With the same brutality Donald Whitney was tied to the whipping post. The rope used was drawn so tight that it cut the flesh and made the blood come.

The burly man who usually did the work as executioner, grinned diabolically. He appeared to be in no hurry to have it over with.

Slowly he stepped forward. He clutched the whip, then he raised it.

Donald Whitney closed his eyes. His teeth were pressed together firmly. Surely this horrible punishment could not last long. A feeling of holy satisfaction surged through him. He was about to suffer for a fellow human being far more unfortunate than himself.

The whip was already cutting through the air. It must fall. But it did not.

No one expected to happen what so unexpectedly came to pass. There was a shrill cry of protest. A woman's voice had uttered it.

The executioner glared about, uneasy and disconcerted. He took another grip on the whip.

"No—no, stop it!" came in the same high-pitched woman's voice.

Mignon had stepped forward, her lovely face white but determined.

"You must not interfere," Count Harcourt ob-

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jected, trying to pull her back. "Let the American get a taste of our prison fare. Let us see if he is the heroic martyr he pretends to be."

"Please let him off," the girl begged. "Can't you see that he is not an ordinary prisoner. Let him off, Felix and——" The rest of the sentence was whispered in the Governor's ear.

The effect was instantaneous. Count Harcourt walked over to Colonel Gautier and gave an order.

"Very well, Your Excellency," the prison official acquiesced.

And it must be said that Colonel Gautier had no qualms of conscience when he commanded that Donald Whitney be spared. For the command was accompanied with an audible sigh.

The young American had been fully prepared to suffer in another's stead. He was not a little surprised when he was freed.

He was more surprised to see Mignon Faraget step up to him and offer her hand. That he owed this sudden turn of affairs to her interference, he knew.

"I — I am grateful to you," he said in a low voice.

Chapter 68

NEW HOPE

DONALD WHITNEY had become the hero of the Tunis prison in less than thirty minutes. While Count Felix Harcourt and Colonel Gautier stood in an earnest conversation with Mignon Faraget an interested listener, the young American found himself surrounded by a crowd of worshipping men and women. They slapped him on the back and called him affectionate names such as only the emotional French mind can think of.

Manet, the cause of the trouble, was being carried away, broken in body and spirit. After being refused a chance to shake the hand of his noble rescuer, he broke down and wept.

At a sharp command from Governor Harcourt, now dominating the scene, the armed guards surrounded the prisoners.

In single file the men and women were ordered to go back to their cells. Donald Whitney, before he disappeared, stole another glance at Mignon Faraget.

Of course, she had been watching his departure with a great deal more than ordinary interest. In her dark eyes was a light that would have aroused Count Harcourt's jealousy, had he seen it.

To the young American it became at once apparent that the guards seemed inclined to treat him with more consideration.

While all the other male prisoners were required to return to hard labor during the afternoon, Whitney

was permitted to remain in his cell. But this did not suit him at all. He would far rather have gone with the others. Solitude was the one thing he dreaded.

When alone his mind insistently wandered back to the happy days gone by. His handsome face grew tender when he thought of his first meeting with Joan and their beautiful romance.

And often he found himself wondering if it had been worth while. For, after all, what had it brought him?

Right now he was placed in a dreadful position. For five years he must remain a prisoner in a strange land. It would have lightened his heavy burden to know that his beloved Joan was safe and in good hands. Then he worried about their baby.

Ah, what a happy moment it had been when little Clifford wound his baby arms about his neck and cooed.

So far as Barbara was concerned, he could not think without bitterness. That woman had been the bane of his life. Because of her he was prosecuted for bigamy and sent to Prison.

Because of her Joan and the baby were perhaps suffering ill-treatment and deprivations.

"That woman shall be punished some day as she deserves." These words he had muttered countless times.

When night came at last, Donald laid down upon his cot to find rest and forgetfulness in sleep. But as always, when his mind was over-active, sleep would not come.

Pacing up and down in his cell, he noticed that one of the guards remained unusually close.

Something else happened that was entirely new to him. The guard disappeared for a few moments, then returned, carrying a small package in his hand. What

did it mean?

The door of his cell was unlocked.

"This is for you, monsieur," whispered the man, then withdrew.

Had Donald been on the alert he would have noticed that the man did not lock the door after him as he went.

When he unwrapped the package he found it to contain several ham sandwiches, a generous slice of cake and some fruit. This was a pleasant surprise indeed.

"I wonder who was kind enough to send me this?" he murmured.

The usual prison fare consisting of thin soup and black bread made him appreciate this food.

He ate with a ravenous appetite. While he sat on the edge of his couch still wondering as to the sender, he discovered that the guard was no longer within sight.

A moment later he made a far more surprising discovery. The slice of cake he was about to devour, came apart. Between was a piece of paper, carefully folded.

After glancing about for a moment, he stepped up to the light. Unfolding the paper, he read the following message:

"Do not despair. For you are not without friends. To-night comes your chance for escape. For your own sake do not disregard it. The man who brings you this food will leave your cell door unlocked. But do not leave until you hear the clock strike twelve.

"When you go out into the corridor, make as little noise as possible. Do not allow any of the other prisoners to see you leave. If you see a guard

at the main exit, pay no attention to him. He will let you pass unmolested.

"Once outside, hurry toward the strip of woods on the north side of the prison building. There you will find a road running east and west. A closed automobile will be awaiting you with a colored chauffeur.

"Ask no questions but get in. You must trust yourself to him. Now follow these instructions implicitly. Remember that if you are caught, it will mean a diet of bread and water in solitary confinement."

There was no signature to this note. But Donald Whitney at once recognized a woman's handwriting.

Who was the sender? So far as he knew he had no female friends in Tunis. He thought of the dark eyed girl who had interceded for him that afternoon.

It could not be her. She was in the company of Count Felix Harcourt. Perhaps she was his wife or daughter. Which, was hard to say.

Donald was in no mood to worry much about that. His soul swelled with the possibility of being free this very night. It was almost too good to come true.

No matter who his yet unknown friend might be, he blessed her with all his heart.

Then, suddenly, it occurred to him that this might be only a ruse to lure him to certain distruction.

Perhaps the prison officials had chosen this method of getting rid of him for good. During the short time he was confined here he recalled two convicts who had been shot and killed for trying to escape.

But hope, once rooted in his soul, was hard to kill.

Before doing anything else, he must get rid of

that note. There was not a place in his cell where he could hide it.

Under the mattress on the cot wouldn't do. The one drawer in the little table wouldn't do. He dare not tear it up and throw the pieces on the floor.

Finally an idea occurred to him. He took off a shoe and flattened the small sheet of paper on the sole. At least it was safe there.

And then he sat down to await the fateful hour. Everything was quiet. All the other prisoners were soundly asleep in adjoining cells. Some of them snored dreadfully.

The only thing which rose above that was the striking of the clock in the prison tower.

He trembled as it began: "One—two—three——", he counted eleven. Another long hour he was compelled to wait. Again he paced the floor, pale and excited.

He became submerged in such a tremendous wave of conflicting thoughts and emotions that he had to sit down quietly to get a grip on himself. For he was trembling like a leaf.

"This won't do. This won't do," he kept repeating over and over in a whisper.

Then sudden weariness overcame him. He had to fight the desire to sleep. His eyes grew heavy. He would have given a great deal to be able to rest for the time he had to spare.

But he dared not risk falling asleep. If he did, his chance for escape would pass by.

With renewed determination he rose. As he glanced through the bars of his cell he saw two guards in the main corridor. They stood close, and one of them gesticulated with his hand.

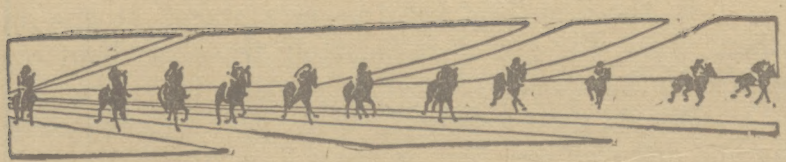
The other seemed to be listening intently, then nodded.

Donald Whitney felt instinctively that they had been discussing him. Perhaps they had been bought by the mysterious sender of that letter.

A moment later they parted. One of them resumed his walk up and down the corridor, while the other disappeared. With a cautious motion the young American banker tried the door.

It swung open with a little creak which sounded like a scream of protest in the deathly silence now prevailing.

Then, at last, the clock in the tower began striking the midnight hour. Donald straightened up with a jerk. The fateful moment had come!



Chapter 69

THE ESCAPE

MODERN PHILOSOPHERS inform us that the passion of fear determines the spirits to the muscles of the knees, which are instantly ready to perform their motion, by taking up the legs with incomparable celerity in order to move the body out of harm's way. Donald Whitney, as he passed out of his cell, was physically too numb to know whether his knees and legs were functioning normally or not.

He was drugged with fear. In his mind lingered constantly the thought of being tricked. Like an automaton he walked clumsily down the iron stairs which led to the main corridor.

Not unexpectedly he came face to face with a guard. He stopped, his heart missing a beat.

In the dim light the two men stared at one another. Then the guard deliberately wheeled about and walked in the opposite direction of the exit.

Donald gave a sigh of relief. This was encouraging and augured well for the immediate future.

His next move was to approach the heavy iron door which led to the courtyard. He was not mistaken when he took it for granted that this door also was unlocked.

In the courtyard he met another guard. This man was pacing back and forth, taking no notice whatever of Whitney.

But there was still another door through which

Donald must pass. The courtyard was flanked on three sides by the tall prison building. A high wall of stone shut in the fourth side. On the top of this wall a third guard stood with a rifle on his shoulder.

Like the other two had done, this man also ignored the escaping prisoner. Whitney's heart beat way up in his throat as he approached the last door which stood between him and liberty.

He passed through without molestation. But in doing so he failed to see the figure lurking in the shadow.

Not until he felt a touch on his arm did he perceive the man now standing within a few feet of him. Donald's first thought was that this individual meant to prevent his escape.

With a swift motion he drew back, his clenched fist raised.

"Don't do that," a low voice said. "I am not an enemy. I am a friend and I want to congratulate you."

Whitney looked close. He recognized the man at once.

He was none other than the guard under whom he had worked the last few days. Then he recalled how this man, so stern and relentless with the other prisoners, had shown a decided inclination to favor him.

"Oh, it is you," he whispered, intensely relieved.

"Yes," replied the guard. "I knew what was to come off to-night. "And I know, too, whose money and influence are responsible. You are a lucky fellow, Whitney, to have a lovely woman go to that extreme for you."

Donald was about to ask a question, but a sudden noise coming from the prison building, silenced him.

"Don't stop a second!" the guard warned. "There may be trouble afoot. Run as fast as you can. I'll take care of any person coming through this door with the intention of thwarting your flight."

With all the speed of which he was capable, Whitney ran. There was a wide road straight ahead of him.

Some distance away another road branched off. He was still within sight of the building. A well aimed shot in the prevailing bright moonlight could easily stop him and kill him, too.

He was too excited to remember the instruction given him in the letter smuggled to him. He had to trust to luck.

On and on he ran, until at last he almost fell utterly exhausted by the roadside. To the left as well as to the right he saw nothing but thick underbrush.

Seated there, panting for breath, he had not the least suspicion that he was being watched.

Perhaps ten feet away a man, hidden in the brush, raised his head and stared at Donald. The latter's pale features were easily recognizable in the moonlight.

"Why, it is the American," was his mental comment. "And he was allowed to escape from the prison. I thought I knew him. Well, this bit of information may come handy. I know someone who will pay a nice little sum for it. Ha, Apache Charley, you are in luck."

The man was really none other than Apache Charley, the dangerous Paris criminal recently escaped from the same prison.

Like a noiseless shadow he followed Donald Whitney as he proceeded on his way. But he was not a little surprised when he saw a closed automobile standing in the road ahead.

He emitted a soft whistle as the young American entered the vehicle without saying a word to the chauffeur.

"Well, I'll be damned!" he muttered under his breath.

While the driver of the car started the motor,

preparing to go, Apache Charley did some fast sprinting. He must find out where the American was being taken. This smacked of an intrigue with a woman behind it.

Just as the car began to move, the outlaw managed to get a good hold of the frame with the spare tire fasted to the rear. While his position was far from being a comfortable one, he held on desperately. Unknown to the chauffeur or the lone passenger, Apache Charley went along.

Donald Whitney, thoroughly mystified, leaned back in his seat. He was no longer in doubt as to the sex of his yet unknown benefactor. For the guard at the door had betrayed it.

But who was the woman? Since his arrival at the Tunis prison he had not seen a single one with the exception of the lovely young creature with Count Harcourt, the Governor of Algeria.

While he had never made it a habit to jump at conclusions that were questionable, he suspected the relationship between these two. Undoubtedly the girl was the Governor's mistress.

Occasionally he stole a glance out of the window. The closed car was passing rapidly through a number of streets, then approached what looked like a suburb.

Fancy houses and villas stood on both sides. He was surprised when the machine stopped in front of one of them.

The chauffeur jumped from his seat and opened the door.

"This is our destination, monsieur," he announced respectfully. "You must enter the villa there—" pointing to a rather elaborate structure partly hidden by palm trees—"where someone will receive you and answer any questions you may desire to ask."

Donald nodded in silence. Intense curiosity dominated him. In approaching the villa he stepped lightly and without looking back.

Had he done so, he would have seen a dark figure detach itself from the closed car and follow him. Apache Charley was after more information, and he was not the man to stop at little things in order to get it.

While Whitney stood at the door about to ring the bell, the Paris outlaw searched for an advantageous position from which he might be permitted a glimpse into the interior of the villa. Such a place he found in a short time.

Donald was admitted into the hall by a colored maid. She showed two rows of gleaming teeth in her peculiar smile of welcome.

"Come with me, monsieur," she said in a low tone of voice.

The next moment he was being ushered into a handsomely furnished sitting room. And there, beside a table filled with books and flowers, stood a young and beautiful woman.

At the first glance he recognized in her the beautiful dark girl he had seen in the courtyard this afternoon.

It was she who had interceded for him when he was fastened to the whipping post. If anything, she looked more beautiful in her lacy dressing gown of soft white silk material.

"I am glad to see you," she greeted, holding out her slim white hand.

The American was utterly at a loss what to reply. This was like some dream. He stared at the girl, his fine eyes holding a question.

She answered it by saying:

"You are now a free man, monsieur. In my house you have nothing to fear. Neither any of the prison officials or even the Governor will molest you. I want you to feel perfectly at ease. Won't you take this chair and sit down? You must be tired."

He did not take the seat and remained standing.

"I — I am very grateful to you," he managed to stammer at last, reaching for her hand and pressing his lips upon it gallantly. "But won't you tell me who you are, and why you take such an interest in me?"

She flashed him an alluring smile.

"Both of your questions I shall answer," she murmured. "My name is Mignon Faraget, and I am Governor Harcourt's friend. This afternoon when I saw you offer yourself as a victim to save another from a horrible punishment, I could not help admire you. Right then and there I made up my mind that they should not whip you."

Donald was studying her features. Suddenly it occurred to him that he had seen the girl previous to that. Again she supplied an answer before he could ask the question.

"You ought to remember me, Mr. Whitney," she said sweetly. "You and I were shipped here on the same boat."

He did remember, but he could not recall whether or not she had been a prisoner like himself. The captain and all the other officers on board had treated her with unusual courtesy.

Perhaps this was done because of her beauty or because she was a woman.

However, this was most emphatically not the time to ask personal questions. Mignon Faraget had saved him from the frightful indignity and torture of being whipped at the post.

Not enough with that, she had contrived to procure his freedom. By what method he did not care to know.

She was a close personal friend of Count Felix Harcourt, the Governor of Algeria. Quite naturally he was a little anxious to ascertain just what the relationship was between them.

And this growing curiosity prompted the inquiry:

"Are you perhaps a relative of Count Harcourt?"

"Not yet, my dear friend," she answered.

Whitney looked puzzled. What did she mean?

"I'll explain," the girl went on, her voice sinking to a confidential whisper. "I hope to be Count Harcourt's wife. He has promised to marry me as soon as he obtains a divorce from his present wife. But you must not let this make any difference to you. Please try to remember that I am your friend first, last and all the time.

"But we must not waste time now talking about such matters. You are my guest for the present. I have made the necessary preparations to make you feel at home here. In the room fixed up for you on the second floor, you will find clothing such as you are used to wearing.

"This suit—" touching the prison jacket gingerly, "is not at all becoming to you. It degrades your handsome personality. Now run up and make the change. In the meantime my servants will serve dinner. I'll be waiting for you here."

The young American banker found this lovely creature almost irresistible. Another alluring smile coaxed him to obey. He moved toward the door, where

a colored servant appeared to take him in charge.

This colored servant was a little fellow with more weight than most of us can carry with comfort. He grinned amiably as he said:

"You come with me, suh," He spoke with the accent of an American negro of the south. "You all want to clean up, don't you?"

"I sure need it," the escaped prisoner replied.

"Alright. Come along, suh."

Chapter 70

"I LOVE YOU!"

LIKE A MAN in a trance Donald Whitney walked up the stairs, the servant leading the way. The hall on the second floor, though small, had at least four doors, each one of them giving access to a bedchamber. The one on the far left had been chosen for the guest. The room was brightly illuminated and splendidly furnished.

In some respects it reminded him of his own bedroom back in Richmond. A pair of velvet portiers, dark red in color, partially hid the entrance to the bath and toilet.

The colored servant, as though divining Whitney's intention, was already busy filling the tub. Having done this, he withdrew with a bow and closing the door softly behind him.

"Ah, what a relief," Donald murmured as he divested himself of the odious prison garb.

Never before had he enjoyed a bath so thoroughly as he did the one he took now. Perfumed soap and several heavy Turkish towels made it a pleasure.

When he finished he stepped out of the tub feeling like a new man physically.

Mignon Faraget had spoken the truth when she told him that she had made all the necessary preparations for his comfort and use. For on a chair, neatly folded, he found the same kind of a Tuxedo suit he used to wear at home for dinner in the evening.

In addition to this there was a white shirt with

starched front, black bow tie and collar.

Even a suit of light underwear lay ready for him. Black patent leather shoes and silk sox completed the outfit.

Every piece of wearing apparel fit him as if he had bought them himself. Still perplexed and somewhat uneasy, he dressed with utmost care. He had just finished when a tap came on the door.

"Come in," he called rather timidly.

The door opened and the colored servant reappeared.

"Mademoiselle is waiting for you," he said, then stood at a respectful distance and waited.

"Very well. I am ready."

But before he left the room, Donald viewed his reflection in the mirror. He had changed very little as a whole.

His cheeks were rather pale and he had lost some weight. His eyes were bright, and the expression of his handsome face was marked by eagerness.

Walking down the stairs, he wondered what would happen next. He found Mignon Faraget awaiting him in the dining salon.

She had changed clothing also. Instead of the silk dressing gown she wore a modish creation of flimsy white material which clung to her lithe and well molded figure like a glove.

There was a glow in her eyes, and her red lips were parted in a half smile.

"Please be seated," she said, indicating a chair.

Donald sat down.

And then he noticed that the table was loaded down with the kind of food he liked. There was broiled chicken and mash potatoes. Several vegetables and dessert were waiting to be eaten. A silver coffee pot be-

trayed its contents by the inviting flavor.

"Everything is ready," the girl murmured as she sank upon th chair on the opposite side of the table. "I shall serve you myself so we won't be disturbed by any of the servants."

And then, as they ate, they talked about general things at first. Mignon seemed to know all about her guest while she spoke little of herself.

Young Whitney watched her with constantly growing amazement, and, it might be added, with considerable admiration. This girl was not only very lovely, but she was also a brilliant conversationalist.

"I am told that you are a very rich man in America," she said suddenly. "You are the president of a bank. Is that not true?"

Donald blushed modestly.

"Yes," he admitted reluctantly. "I am the president of a bank and considered wealthy. But money has come to mean so little to me. Unless it brings you happiness, it is of no use whatever."

Mignon regarded him seriously for a moment.

"You are wrong there, my dear friend," she disagreed. "Wealth always brings one friends and influence. A man with plenty of money can do so many things that a poor person can't. Don't you think so?"

"That may be true," Whitney asserted rather half-heartedly. "I have found, however, that wealth can not always save you when you have broken the law. I had the misfortune to come in conflict with the law. As a result you found me a prisoner."

"Yes, a prisoner," the girl repeated, putting a great deal of sympathy into the words. "They kept you in that frightful hole with hordes of Paris criminals of the worst type."

He shrugged his shoulders and tried to laugh.

"Perhaps I deserved it, Mademoiselle Mignon."

"I don't believe it," the latter returned swiftly. "And I can not forgive Count Harcourt for keeping you there. He is the Governor of Algeria. He ought to have seen at once that you were a man of good family connections and education. It was brutal of him."

Whitney studied the girl for several seconds.

"You may be right," he declared. "But I can not understand why you speak in that manner of Count Harcourt, whose close friend and promised bride you claim to be."

This answer seemed to disconcert Mignon Faraget. For a moment a dark frown appeared on her white brow. It went away slowly.

"You — you will no doubt be surprised when I tell you that Count Harcourt is a close friend of mine," she said, looking Donald straight in the eyes. "I may have told you that. I expect to marry him because of the position he can give me as his wife."

This frank admission appalled the young American banker.

Was the girl just one of those mercenary creatures ready to sell herself for social position and a life of luxury and ease?

"Then — then you do not love him?" he stammered.

"Love him?" Mignon laughed. "Mercy, no. I can't even say truthfully that I like him."

Donald was utterly at a loss for words. For a long time he ate in silence, hoping that the girl would change the subject.

He did not care to listen to her admitting such an unpleasant degree of selfishness and cold-heartedness.

Although he was not aware of it. Mignon Faraget was studying his handsome features and his erect,

manly figure. Occasionally a flame leaped up into her eyes.

"I — I know you don't think well of me," she began presently. "You can't after what I told you. But I am a woman. From my earliest youth I have had to fight for my bread and butter. Once I was known as the best dancer in Paris.

"My salary rose steadily with my success. And then — and then, I made the mistake of trusting a man too far. I went——"

"Please, Mademoiselle Mignon," he interrupted, "you are distressing yourself. Why speak of an unhappy past? We all have had that. In every life there are things we would like to recall and undo were such a thing possible."

"But you must hear me to the end," the girl said in a pleading tone. "I must try to justify my position here. Perhaps you did not know it, but I came to Tunis also a prisoner. The Governor, Count Felix Harcourt, saw me and brought about my release.

"He put me in this villa and surrounded me with all the luxuries dear to a woman's heart. Of course he expected to be paid. I refused unless he promised to make me his wife.

"At present, however, he still has a wife. She is here in this city. He quarreled with her and now she is staying at a hotel with her brother, Armand Duverne of Paris. What the eventual outcome will be, I don't know nor care. One thing is absolutely certain, I shall never give myself to any man unless I love him. And I don't love Count Harcourt."

Donald saw before him the worst bundle of feminine contradiction he had ever met. The situation in which she admittedly found herself was as tragic as it was ridiculous.

Obviously Count Harcourt was keeping her in luxury, hoping that sooner or later she would bend to his will.

The idea that he would ever make her his wife was preposterous. Men of his type don't marry such women.

It was all so incongruous and so utterly impossible that young Whitney did not know what to make of it.

The dinner had come to an end. Just as he anticipated, Mignon invited him into the cozy sitting room. A tall floor lamp with a red shade cast a dull crimson glow over the costly rug and furniture.

He elected to sit on the divan in the corner.

In his mind he was already convinced that the girl was a neat little gold digger. He knew the species. New York abounded with them. But in spite of that he could not help but admire her.

He knew something about the kind of men who go after beautiful young girls like her.

They were, as a rule, the unscrupulous, licentious beasts he had learned to detest. Mignon Faraget had been forced, no doubt by averse luck, to fight her own way in the world.

Her best stock in trade was her youthful loveliness. Why should she not be permitted to sell it at the highest price obtainable?

But Donald's speculations in the direction took a sudden turn when the girl took a seat beside him. She lit a cigaret calmly, then offered him one. The next moment they were both inhaling the fragrant weed.

"Now tell me frankly what you think of me?" she began, focusing her dark eyes on his.

"What I think of you?" Donald uttered a forced laugh. "I think you are a brave little girl. You have done something for me which perhaps a thousand others

would not have dared. You freed me from a prison that had become hell to me. I wish I could repay you in some way."

This time she laughed. It was a carefree, almost happy gurgle.

"A woman will dare a good many things if she makes up her mind," she declared. "And she will do much for a man she pities. For pity, you know, is akin to love. I could never tell you how sorry I felt for you the first time I saw you on the boat that brought us here.

"Of course, you did not notice me. In fact, I don't think you noticed any one. You were so miserable. And when we landed in the prison, you were ill. Colonel Gautier ordered you taken to the hospital. That was the last I saw of you until this afternoon.

"After Count Harcourt took me away, I asked him several times to permit me to visit the prison in his company. But he always refused. I was anxious to see you again. Funny, wasn't it? But it is true. At last he consented. And you don't know how glad I am that I arrived in time to prevent you being whipped at the post.

"That same hour I determined to free you. It was far easier than I expected. There isn't a single prison guard who can not be bought with money. I had plenty of it and I spent it. Thank God you are free now. And you won't go back no matter what happens. I won't permit it."

The American banker had listened with some surprise and then with growing uneasiness to the girl's lengthy and often impassionate speech.

But before he could make an answer, he felt her soft arms about his neck. She snuggled close up to him and lay her dark head upon his breast. For a moment he sat stunned by the sudden turn of affairs.

"Please don't be too much shocked," Mignon murmured. "For I have learned to love you."

"You — you love me?" he gasped.

"Yes, I love you dearly," the girl repeated in an awed whisper. "God only knows why. I suppose it was pity first. When I saw the fine manly qualities in you this afternoon, I knew I had met my fate. No other man of my acquaintance would have been willing to sacrifice himself for another like you did."

He drew her arm very gently away from about his neck. Then he seized both of her hands and held them firm.

"My dear, dear child," he said tenderly, "I am not worthy of such love. You are bestowing upon me a gift I dare not accept. I am not a cad. Remember your promise to Count Harcourt. You are to be his wife as soon as he gains his freedom. You——"

"Speak not of him now!" Mignon cried. "I shall never marry him. I hate his breed. I love you. I want you!"

As she uttered these words she jerked her hand from his grasp and wound them again about his neck. Her eyes were ablaze with passion now. They stared into his with compelling force.

Chapter 71

A CRY OF DISTRESS

HAD DONALD WHITNEY been less of a man and more of a cur, he would have quickly succumbed to the girl's charms. And he felt that he owed her something for all she had done for him. For a moment only he seemed to weaken. Then there rose before him the pleading figure of Joan with the baby in her arms.

And her oft repeated plea came back to him.

"I don't care what the world may think of me," she had said. "I don't care whether I am your wife or not. I am yours — all yours. And this baby is ours — ours. All I ask is that you remain true to me."

Donald had promised this more than once.

"Joan — Joan! Remember Joan!" his soul cried out.

White with emotion and also determination, he rose and stood there facing Mignon.

"No — no, this must not be!" he cried, his voice strangling in his throat. "I know it will hurt you, dear girl, but I can not do otherwise. You must know the truth. My heart belongs to someone else."

"You — you love some other woman?" she gasped.

He nodded, his head bowed.

"What of that?" Mignon demanded fiercely. "Can't you forget her for an hour? You can and you must!"

Obviously she was in the throes of an overwhelm-

ing passion. And a woman in that state will not be denied. The man she craved stood before her within reach. He was handsome and desirable.

"I — I am sorry," she heard him say. "Very sorry."

But that did not appease Mignon. With a low cry she threw her arms about his neck. He may have made an effort to prevent it when she kissed him. However, the effort proved a failure.

She clung to him desperately, calling him by every endearing term her whirling brain could suggest.

It was not an easy task to draw away from her, but Donald succeeded at last.

"Come, sit down here with me," he said, trying to be calm. "You have told me your story. Now you must listen to mine. No, don't kiss me again," he protested when she seemed about to press her lips to his. "I won't let you cheapen yourself."

This sobered Mignon up. She stepped back, wiping the tears from her cheek.

"Alright, I'll listen," she answered, not at all sure of her voice.

Seated so close together that their shoulders touched, Donald Whitney began to talk.

He spoke feelingly about his unhappy marriage with Barbara, his meeting with Joan, and how he appeased his love-hungry soul in the latter's presence.

In a tone quivering with emotion, he related how he brought Joan to Paris, the arrival of the baby after their marriage ceremony, and such details as he could remember.

"That girl made the greatest sacrifice a woman can make for a man," he ended. "She presented to me her most priceless gift. Loving her as I did, I took it. But I promised to remain true to her in thought and

deed. I would rather suffer anything than break that promise.

"You have done much for me, Mignon," he added, touching her hand lightly. "You presented me with my freedom. I'll give it back to you. I'll return to the prison if that will satisfy you. I'll go now. I can find the way back."

Mignon Faraget had been deeply impressed. She was not the kind of a woman to regret anything she had done.

Neither was she vindictive. She still loved this handsome American.

To permit him to go back to the prison was unthinkable. Way down in her starving heart lay the hope that she might yet win his love.

As her constant guest her kindness and self-sacrificing spirit might carry off the victory in spite of all previous entanglements.

"I'll not let you go back," she said, turning to him. "You will stay here. No, don't be afraid, I am not going to kiss you," she added quickly when he drew away. "I am over that now."

And then Donald Whitney was treated to the spectacle of seeing a heartbroken woman weep bitter tears of disappointment.

"My God, don't!" he implored. "I can stand anything but that!"

The girl pulled herself together. At least he pitied her. And that was something. She gave him a smile so sweet that it hurt him. Then he rose and began pacing the floor.

Mignon's rapt eyes followed his every move.

Ah, how hard it was to give this handsome American up. And then she vowed that she wouldn't without a struggle. Other men with stone hearts had been won

over.

Surely this man was made of flesh and blood like the rest. But she was not at all sure that he would remain under her roof after what happened.

To keep him near had now become her sole object. This question must be settled first.

"Donald," she said coaxingly, "I want you to come here and sit down with me. Please, do. I promise to behave. I realize I made a fool of myself, and I am sorry."

He imagined he caught a note of sincerity in her voice. In compliance with her request he resumed his seat.

"If we can't be lovers," Mignon began, "we can at least be friend. I'll be a true friend and as such I do not regret having bought your freedom. To-morrow the prison officials wil have a fit when they discover your absence.

"There will be an inquiry during which every guard is closely questioned. Of course, a vehement denial of complicity in your escape will let them off.

"But that won't be the end so far as you are concerned, Donald. Colonel Gautier, backed up by Governor Harcourt, are certain to make every effort to locate your hiding place. If you should happen to be seen on the street, your instant arrest will follow.

"My house must remain your refuge for the present. I receive no visitors except Count Harcourt. And whenever he comes, you keep out of sight. I shall keep informed as to the sailing of the various steamers. You can be smuggled aboard one of them at an opportune moment. And once aboard, you can snap your fingers at Colonel Gautier and the Governor of Algeria."

Whitney perceived sound logic in the girl's argument. Nothing could suit him better than a chance to

return to Paris and renew the search for Joan.

"Will you accept what I offer you?" she spoke again with a furtive glance through the corners of her eyes.

"Gladly," he exclaimed, "only you are risking too much for me, Mignon. You are jeopardizing your own personal safety and perhaps your liberty by harboring me. Are you sure you want to take such awful chances for one——"

"There isn't anything I would not do for you, Donald!" And she meant it. "There is a room above the servants' quarters in the rear of the house. You may occupy that without worrying about being found. You may take possession of that room at once, if you like."

The idea appealed to him. He was anxious to be alone and think — something he could not do clearly in the presence of this enticing woman.

"Yes, I would like to retire," he said, rising somewhat abruptly. "I am very tired and sleepy."

Mignon Faraget rose also. She rang for a servant and instructed him to conduct her guest to the room in the rear of the villa. As they parted, Donald and the girl shook hands.

"Pleasant dreams, Donald," she said, smiling into his eyes.

"The same to you," he responded, smiling also.

Whitney was taken through a dark hallway at the end of which was a door. Presently he found himself in the open. The cool night air caressed his throbbing temples. For a short distance they walked on, then stopped.

"Here is the stairway, monsieur," the colored servant whispered. "Follow me."

Up a flight of stairs they went, and then entered a room pervaded by a musty odor. Evidently it had not

been occupied for a long time during which the windows must have remained closed.

The servant switched on the light, then bowed respectfully and disappeared.

The room was nicely furnished. But it could not be compared with the one in which Donald changed clothing an hour or so ago.

He looked about for a moment. Everything was so quiet that he could hear the beating of his own heart. Seated on the edge of the bed, he tried to marshall his mental forces.

Suddenly he became rigid. What was that?

The mournful wail of a woman's voice came from somewhere. It was not far off. Again it assailed Whitney's ears, ending in a sob.

Then followed something that caused him to jump up and stand intensely alert.

"I can not stay here alone," came the same woman's voice. "Oh, I am so afraid. Help me — help me, someone. Donald — Donald, why don't you come to me. Why have you forsaken me."

Donald staggered without knowing it. That voice!

"Merciful God!" he gasped. "It can't be and yet——"

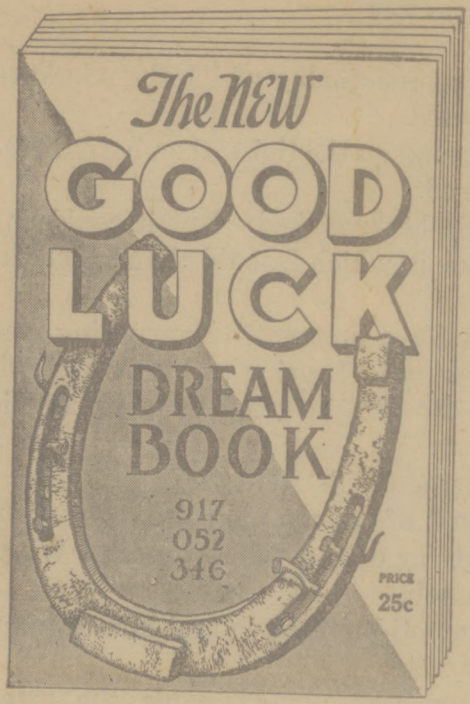
Again he listened, his face deathly white and trembling in every limb.

"Donald — Donald!" The voice had grown much weaker.

Every vestige of doubt was swept away instantly. He had been listening to Joan's pitiful appeal for help. And she was being kept a prisoner in the room adjoining his.

Yes, he was positive of that now. Ah, his prayers had been answered at last. He was near Joan.

Continued in next number



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